

MINUTES
California Biodiversity Council
September 18, 1997
Eastern Sierra Regional Meeting
Mammoth Lakes, California

Members Present

Douglas Wheeler, Resources Agency
Jim Branham, Resources Agency
Al Wright, Bureau of Land Management
Gary Gilbert, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Patricia Wolf, Department of Fish and Game
Ken Jones, Department of Parks and Recreation
Jim Lawrence, USDA Forest Service
Tad Bell, Department of Food and Agriculture
Laurence "Bud" Laurent, South Central Coast Regional Association
Robert Hight, State Lands Commission
Alex Glazer, University of California
Bob Haussler, California Energy Commission
Randall Brown, Department of Water Resources
Mietek Kolipinski, National Park Service
Helen Flach, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Diane Noda, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Chuck Solomon, Bureau of Reclamation
Alexis Strauss, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Mike Shulters, U.S. Geological Survey
Scott Hatch, USGS Biological Resource Division
Colonel Eric Christenson, U.S. Marine Corps (ex-officio)
Bill Maze, San Joaquin Valley Regional Association of California Counties
Nancy Huffman, Northern California Counties Association
Donna Thomas, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
Jerry Harmon, San Diego Association of Governments

Call to Order

Douglas Wheeler called the meeting to order at 8:40 am.

Approval of minutes for the March 20, 1997 and June 16, 1997 meetings

Nancy Huffman asked that her name be added as present to the June 16, 1997 meeting. The minutes were approved with noted corrections.

Report of Executive Committee - Al Wright

The CBC will be periodically presenting an award to an individual who has shown outstanding spirit and enthusiasm for biological conservation. This award will be given in honor of Harley Greiman. Details on the award process will follow at the next CBC meeting.

Regional Leadership Forums

There are two Regional Leadership Forums scheduled for the Sierras. Council members Ray Nutting and Bill Maze will lead the forums. On October 23 in Pollock Pines (Central Sierras), there will be a discussion on fire management. In the South Sierras there will be a forum on air quality management. It was scheduled for September 12, but it had to be postponed.

Biodiversity Education Foundation

The Executive Committee has discussed the need for a foundation. The consensus is that we should attach ourselves to an existing foundation rather than start a new one. The Education Committee was tasked to first define what the message is we want to send. This will help focus the end result.

Science Coordinating Committee

The purpose of this committee is to develop a shared data base in California among various federal, state and local agencies. Everyone would contribute to it, therefore everyone could use it. State Parks is developing a cultural resource data base. Currently, many agencies have their own endangered species list data base. There is a need to pull them together and develop a list for special status species.

Budget

Fees for 1997-98 are being paid. Currently, we have enough to support Council activities until the first of the year. A reminder was made to pay your dues, if you have not already. A budget summary for FY 96-97 was passed out.

Next meetings

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for October 16 in Sacramento. The next CBC meeting is scheduled for November 20 in Davis. The theme of this meeting will be how we strengthen ties with local government to plan for growth, protect biodiversity, and have a healthy economy. The Department of Defense will also discuss their biological conservation initiatives.

Council Announcements

Patricia Wolf - Department of Fish and Game (DFG)

DFG recently published *California Wild Gardens: A Living Legacy*. This was a ten-year effort of DFG, the California Academy of Sciences and the California Native Plant Society. Many agencies helped fund the effort. It showcases native plants and habitats and various conservation efforts ongoing around the state. The information is organized by bioregions. The book contains 236 pages and has over 500 photos. The Council congratulated the Department of Fish and Game on their successful publication.

Mietek Kolipinski – National Park Service, California Rivers Assessment

A recent brochure on California Rivers has been published. Copies are available.

Scott Hatch - USGS Biological Resource Division

A draft Memorandum of Agreement has been developed by the Scientific Coordinating Committee. Many, if not all, of the federal and state land management and regulatory agencies will be asked to sign. It has 12 goals the main purpose being sharing data, maintaining an inventory of species and habitat, and reducing duplicative efforts. One of the databases that will be tracked is noxious weeds. DFG is taking the lead to develop this and include it as one of the databases that will be developed.

Possible follow-up item: Environmental Protection Agency's data sets are proprietary. How can we share this kind of data?

Jerry Harmon – San Diego Association of Governments

Within the next two decades, California will grow to 40 million people. This fact cannot be ignored while discussing biodiversity. Jerry Harmon and Don Erman have formed a subcommittee to look at the question of population increase impacts on biological diversity. They are working with several professors at the University of California. A report will be presented at the November meeting. The report will not provide answers, but will be a starting point for discussion.

Donna Thomas – California Resource Conservation Districts

The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) annual conference is November 9-11, 1997. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be holding a conservation program for the Central Valley Project on October 7, 8 and 15, 1997. The focus will be on listed species and species of concern.

Colonel Eric Christenson – Department of Defense

The Sites Act Reauthorization will affect California military installations. It is tied to the Defense Reauthorization Bill. This reauthorization mandates resource management plans for all installations and requires Department of Defense (DOD) to work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Fish and Game to evaluate existing management practices. A public comment period on their activities is required. On December 3 there will be a public information meeting on the new range rules for DOD land.

Doug Wheeler – Resources Agency

The World Wildlife Foundation is preparing a "Conservation Assessment of Terrestrial Ecosystem in North America." It highlights thirteen high-risk areas, four of which are in California: North Coast Forest, Klamath/Siskiyou Forest, Sierra/Nevada Forest, and coastal sage scrub communities of Southern California. The report indicates that these areas represent biodiversity equal to the Everglades. Copies will be shared when it becomes available.

The Eastern Sierra: Balancing Biodiversity and a Recreation-based Economy

The morning presentations were made by a number of scientists, government agency representatives, and local stakeholders. The three major themes were (1) identifying biodiversity and economic diversity an enormous, lightly populated region; (2) problems with planted trout and yellow-legged frogs in high alpine lakes; and (3) managing wetlands.

The Setting: a description of the social, economic, and natural characteristics of the Eastern Sierra - Andrea Lawrence, Dr. Connie Millar, and Dr. William Stewart

The introductory panel presented a comprehensive overview of the characteristics that make the Eastern Sierra so unique. Following on themes discussed at the CURES' (Coalition for United Recreation in the Eastern Sierra) meeting and the talk by Phil Pister the proceeding day, the speakers illustrated the unique biodiversity of the region and how intricately the economy and the environment are linked. The CURES' goal is that by the year 2010, the region will diversify high quality recreational activities as a way to protect resources and protect the strong sense of place that the natural environment brings to the region.

A key challenge occurs when unique areas of biodiversity are in areas that also have very high economic value for local or regional development. Economically, the dominance of recreation businesses in the Eastern Sierra is part of the reason for the higher per capita incomes, lower unemployment, and slower in-migration of new permanent residents. On the down side, the cyclical nature of different recreation seasons requires considerable shifts from job to job during every year.

Conclusion: a diverse economy cannot be based on any one sector, i.e. intense recreation. It needs to be dispersed throughout the Sierras. Economic diversity can happen if they look at other areas as examples. By doing so environmental diversity of the region can be protected.

Fish Stocking and the Yellow-legged Frog – Bill Bramlette, Kathleen Matthews, Roland Knapp, Charlie Morgan, and Darrell Wong

A biological diversity issue of the area is the practice of fish stocking and the impact this activity has on the yellow-legged frog. Since the high-elevation lakes in the Eastern Sierras are naturally "fishless," stocking is very controversial. Without stocking, fishing as a sport could decline considerably in remote areas. However, the yellow-legged frog could be listed as a federally endangered species. Listing could mandate an immediate cessation of stocking in critical habitat for yellow-legged frogs.

The USDA Forest Service and the Department of Fish and Game are working together to identify solution to this issue. Options include eliminate stocking activities, remove existing fish in some natural way, and continue to stock some areas and eliminate the practice elsewhere. The agencies are using the wilderness planning program by the USDA Forest Service to make area-specific decisions about fish stocking. While the wilderness plans are still in preparation, it is likely that most will call for the elimination of stocking in some areas that will be restored by that action. Stocking will likely continue in other areas where public recreation has become traditionally linked to fishing for planted fish.

Managing Wetlands in the Eastern Sierra – Scott Burns, Scott Ferguson

The discussion then turned to managing wetlands. The speakers described Eastern Sierra wetlands as being diverse in terms of types of wetlands and their various functions. Before management practices can be determined, the resource needs to be assessed and mapped. The goal is no net loss of wetlands, yet various activities continue to impact them. A wetlands management strategy would address protection measures, local policy development and implementation, and ways to deal with competing interests that impede natural wetland function. Management policy implementation will take a concerted effort by local, state and federal agencies with a strong emphasis on local policy development and implementation. Also, public outreach, education and public involvement needs to be done on a collaborative basis among local, state and federal agencies. All agencies have limited resources - by combining efforts more can be done.

Scott Burns, Mono County Planning Director, presented a case study on how wetlands are being managed in Mono County. There were many wetland violations cited by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. An oversight committee was formed to try and correct the situation. In the Bridgeport area, all relevant state, federal, and local agencies participated, along with representatives from universities in the area. First, wetlands were mapped. Then, a six square mile area was identified as an area where specific policies would be applied. Public input was taken. Concerns over the accuracy of the reconnaissance maps by landowners whose parcels could be misidentified led to the first maps not being well received. Property owners did not want to see lines on maps that may incorrectly delineate wetlands on their property. The committee decided to form a collaborative planning team, hold public forums, bring the public in early in the process to obtain early buy in, and make sure all groups that should participate did participate.

The County amended their general plan to include specific maps and policies regarding wetlands. Examples of the policies are: no net loss of wetlands, identify wetlands in need of restoration and restore them, provide land banking opportunities, and regulate grazing and irrigation practices. The general plan amendment also supports interagency work, clarifies and simplifies the permit process, promotes in-fill, and regulates single family development.

Currently, the County has identified restoration sites and the various agencies are assisting the community on how and where to mitigate.

Balancing biodiversity and recreation use: past and present efforts – Bill Bramlette, Genevieve Rasmussen, Jeff Irons, Phil Pister, and Tim Alpers

Opportunities for Improving Collaboration – Bob Michener, John Frederickson, Sally Miller, Tracy Grubbs, Dick Noles, Mike Coffey, and Tony Colasardo

The speakers provided a number of examples of friction between different recreational users and ways to reduce problems. There was a discussion about the use of federal lands and how the public can provide input and be involved in decision making. The success of CURES illustrates the value of consensus rather than confrontational approaches. Consensus groups should be formed to facilitate discussion. These groups are often called “collaborative groups.” *The CBC needs to develop guides and standards for collaborative groups to be successful (potential action item here).* Collaborative groups should recognize the following: there should be no pressure to reach consensus, formality and size of groups should encourage affective communication, process is not more important than the product, they should recognize their limits, and they should recognize the importance of non-resident stakeholders. Experiences in the Eastern Sierra suggest that collaborative processes need volunteers and the right issues.

Tracy Grubbs of the Sierra Business Council presented the Council with copies of their recent publication *Planning for Prosperity*. She summarized some of their findings. In the Sierras, there is an increasing number of new businesses attracted to the high quality of life. This has brought challenges to the business community as they try to accommodate sound growth and development on private land still maintaining the rural character of the area. Re-investment in the town core is needed to enhance economic vitality. A plan is needed to maintain the health of the natural system, planning for urban growth and its interface with rural activities such as farming. A recent public opinion poll showed that 88 percent of the voters want a healthy economy and a healthy environment, and 68 percent of the voters believe that better land use planning is the way to achieve this.

Council discussion

The Council would like to see more information on collaborative planning. It appears that collaborative planning works only if there are volunteers.

Public Comment

Penny McCoy – Mammoth Mountain Ski Area

Jeanne Adams – Mono Inn and Sierra information center

Pat Davinson – People for the West

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 pm.